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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000496

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOXO
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[11.](#) Mideast
[12.](#) Iran

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio quoted PM Ehud Olmert as saying in Ankara today that he

is prepared to talk with the Palestinians if they agree to Israel's terms. Leading media reported that, during his current visit to Ankara, Olmert is expected to seek Turkey's help in having the remains of Mossad agent Eli Cohen, executed in Damascus in 1965, repatriated. Maariv wrote that Turkey will offer to mediate between Israel and Syria.

All media reported, and most bannered, that at an official ceremony on Wednesday, Gabi Ashkenazi took over the position of chief of staff from outgoing Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz. All media reported that Ashkenazi left his post as director-General of the Defense Ministry a week ago, but that it is still unclear who will replace him. Most media said that reservist generals are turning down the job offer because the tenure of Amir Peretz at the ministry is short.

Leading media reported that last night PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas canceled a speech scheduled for today in which he was expected to officially appoint PM Ismail Haniyeh to form the Palestinian unity government. The media said that Abbas made the decision after Hamas presented three conditions for Haniyeh's resignation from his post, which was to have enabled Abbas to make him prime minister of the new government. Hatzofe and Israel Radio reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will hold separate "preparatory meetings" with Olmert and Abbas on Sunday, before the tripartite talks. The media said that the purpose of the move is to lower the sides' expectations. Hatzofe quoted diplomatic sources as saying that the US has asked Abbas to delay the establishment of the Palestinian unity government, which Hatzofe wrote Abbas agreed to.

Ha'aretz reported that the Bush administration's pledge to transfer USD 86 million to Abbas was blocked by Congress. The US administration had publicly pledged the funds, but a number of congressmen are skeptical about the funding. On Tuesday, Ha'aretz learned from a source in the office of Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-NY) that skepticism regarding the wisdom of transferring funds has only intensified as a result of the agreement. The newspaper quoted sources in Washington as saying on Wednesday that it is possible that the administration is waiting for a clearer picture of the new Palestinian leadership. "This could actually be convenient for the administration," one of the sources was quoted as saying, "because it is not the one that has to freeze the funding -- it is being done by Congress."

Ha'aretz reported that the Jerusalem police are bracing for a resumption of disturbances on the Temple Mount on Friday.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel is considering allowing four Jordanian prisoners, convicted of murdering an IDF soldier in the early 1990s, to serve the rest of their sentence in Jordan. Olmert pledged a few months ago to King Abdullah II of Jordan to reevaluate the possibility of freeing the four, and transferred the matter to the Justice Ministry.

Leading media reported that on Wednesday in the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI received the families of the two IDF soldiers abducted by Hizbullah last summer.

Ha'aretz cited information recently received in Jerusalem according to which French President Jacques Chirac has announced his support for lessening pressure on Iran to stop its nuclear program, for fear Hizbullah will strike at French troops serving in Lebanon, according to information recently received in Jerusalem. Ha'aretz cited reports as saying that Chirac proposed sending a special envoy to Tehran to reach understandings that would protect the French soldiers serving in the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Ha'aretz quoted a GOI source in Jerusalem as saying that Chirac's position is controversial in Paris, with the French Foreign Ministry continuing to support a hard line with regard to the Iranian nuclear program, a position also expressed Wednesday by the French Ambassador to Israel, Jean-Michel Casa, in an interview with Ha'aretz.

The Jerusalem Post cited an AP story quoting former Iranian FM Ali Akbar Velayati, an envoy of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as saying in an interview published on Wednesday by the Italian daily La Repubblica that the Holocaust was a historical fact, but that it could not be used to justify the oppression of Palestinians.

Yediot reported that Saudi Prince Al-Walid Bin Talal is holding talks to build a hotel on Tel Aviv's beach. The venture is together with the Israeli-Arab Abulafia family. The plans submitted to the municipality refer to an eight-story hotel with 150 rooms.

Maariv quoted sources in Shas as saying that Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the party's spiritual mentor, may recommend that its Knesset members vote for Vice PM Shimon Peres as the next president of Israel.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The Jerusalem summit will go down as another tactical victory for Olmert's 'yes, but' policy, but will in no way bring us closer to a solution to the conflict."

Former Foreign Ministry director-general Alon Liel wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "The understandings reached between the PLO and Hamas in Saudi Arabia are a welcome development. We cannot ignore the fact that these understandings have 'semi recognition' of Israel by Hamas."

Researcher Shlomo Brom, from Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), wrote in INSS Insight and the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The creation of [a Palestinian] national unity government will provide an opportunity for all parties involved to reassess current policy vis- -vis the Palestinians and a possible revival of the political process."

The Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The Orwellian attempt to lump Israel among odious regimes, while ignoring real abusers, employs a double standard so blatant as to fit international definitions of anti-Semitism."

Block Quotes:

II. "The Hot-Air Summit"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/15): "Olmert is the great successor of Sharon, and he is even more successful than his predecessor at presenting inflexible positions behind a mask of moderation and openness. He is sensitive to the nuances of the international community, woos its leaders and enlists them in imposing his conditions on the Palestinians. The Jerusalem summit will go down as another tactical victory for Olmert's 'yes, but' policy, but will in no way bring us closer to a solution to the conflict. The only consolation is that Rice will come to the region this time in a small plane, thus cutting down on fuel and air pollution on her way to another unnecessary journey."

II. "A Step in the Right Direction"

Former Foreign Ministry director-general Alon Liel wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/15): "The understandings reached between the PLO and Hamas in Saudi Arabia are a welcome development.

We cannot ignore the fact that these understandings have 'semi recognition' of Israel by Hamas since in the Saudi understandings, they accept all the international agreements that the PLO signed in the past.... Israel is suffering from diplomatic paralysis, which obligates it to begin moving any possible muscle before all its muscles go into deep or perhaps terminal atrophy. The 'Saudi understandings' are an excellent opportunity for Olmert. The summit scheduled with Abu Mazen and the top US administration officials in Washington must absolutely not be canceled. True, it is difficult to imagine peace negotiations with a Palestinian government that does not directly recognize Israel. Along with this, just as Hamas has now gone into a gray area, Olmert too can do the same. Israel must announce that it will cooperate with the new Palestinian government on economic and humanitarian matters, in the hope that further moderation on Hamas's part will also lead, further down the

road, to diplomatic negotiations."

III. "The Palestinian Unity Government"

Researcher Shlomo Brom, from Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), wrote in INSS Insight and the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (12/15): "The ball is now in the court of the international actors and Israel, who have to decide whether [the] formulation [of the Mecca Agreement] marks a move toward acceptance of the Quartet's conditions and allows them to begin to work with the new Palestinian government and remove the sanctions or whether it simply falls too far short of their demands and therefore obliges them to persist in their pressure. The indications are that a split will develop over this question between the United States and Israel, on one side, and the European Union and Russia, on the other. The former will probably maintain a more rigid position while the Europeans will claim -- and this is already the declared position of Russia -- that the Mecca Agreement constitutes the beginning of a process of moderation in Hamas's posture that should be encouraged by working with the new government and easing the sanctions. The agreement itself is fragile.... The agreement's viability also depends on the behavior of outside actors.... It is also not clear whether the two main outside actors -- Israel and the United States -- will view the agreement as a chance to promote diplomatic movement. At this stage, it seems that both tend to view it in a negative light and will refrain from engaging with the new Palestinian government. In any event, the creation of national unity government will provide an opportunity for all parties involved to reassess current policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians and a possible revival of the political process."

IV. "The Apartheid Libel"

The Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/15): "It is tempting to ignore 'Israel Apartheid Week,' an anti-Israel hate-fest taking place this week in Canada, England and the US. The organizers of such events, though they claim to be supporting Palestinian rights, will obviously not be satisfied unless the Jewish state ceases to exist..... Israelis, be they Arabs or Jews, are much freer than anywhere in the Arab world. This is relevant because the 'apartheid' charge brands Israel as a human rights abuser. But what sense does it make to berate the only country in the region that does respect human rights, while ignoring the rampant abuses taking place throughout the Muslim world?.... Israel, like other democracies, does not have a perfect human rights record. But the Orwellian attempt to lump Israel among odious regimes, while ignoring real abusers, employs a double standard so blatant as to fit international definitions of anti-Semitism. Such libelous campaigns are themselves an abuse of the lofty cause of human rights and, in the context of calls to 'wipe Israel off the map,' contribute to the ultimate human rights abuse, incitement to genocide."

----- 12. Iran: -----

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "International embarrassment will do more damage to the Iranians than missiles."

Block Quotes:

"The Ethical Dimension"

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/15): "How ... should Israel act in the next critical months in regard to the Iranian nuclear program? I do not want to relate, in this article, to the possibility of an Israeli strike on Iran, but rather to our public and secret options for action in the near future. On the rhetorical level, Israel must not speak, not even a word, against Iran. Otherwise, Iran will exploit

this, as Hamas and [Israel's] Islamic Movement exploited the affair of the bridge near the Temple Mount, and portrayed this as a battle of all the Muslims against Israel.... But on other levels, there is a lot that can be done.... Israel must be the dynamo behind the world battle -- the diplomatic, trade or other battle -- against Iran, and all in complete secrecy. But Israel also has another, powerful ability that no other country has, and that is the ethical dimension. Jewish organizations all over the world ... must hold a series of permanent and ongoing demonstrations opposite Iranian embassies in the West, to embarrass the Iranians and not to let the matter drop from the agenda -- Jewish organizations, not Israel. The subject: Iran's intention to destroy Israel; Holocaust deniers planning a second Holocaust, and so on. For a country like Iran, whose legitimacy is running out, this is the hardest blow.

International embarrassment will do more damage to the Iranians than missiles. Official Israel must not have any involvement in the demonstrations.... The message should be: Iran is a moral blot on the world's neck, as it is the only country in the world that is threatening the destruction of another country. In this regard, we have been given a gift from Ahmadinejad with his Holocaust deniers conference. There is a world consensus on our side in this regard. Such pressure will ensure the continuation and even the intensification of the international sanctions, until the nuclear program is completely halted, and perhaps even strangles the Khomeinist regime, which constitutes the toughest, but also the last, link in the axis of evil."

JONES